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WHAT'S IN RESERVE?

Lessons from our experiences in Desert Storm indicate some severe problems lie in our reserve component. This paper tries to analyze those problems and suggests some solutions to build a more capable total force.

LtCol R. J. Linhart
Committee 4
Seminar C

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INTRODUCTION

"We can meet the challenges of the foreseeable future with a much smaller force than we have had in recent years. Our force for the 1990's is a Base Force -- A Total Force - A Joint Force -- a carefully tailored combination of our active and reserve components."

- Gen Colin Powell

General Powell's words, taken from the forward to the 1992 National Military Strategy of the United States, frames a critical debate that is ongoing. The crux of this politically sensitive issue is how to apportion the nation's military forces between the active and reserve components. The resultant mix of forces must be able to answer the nation's security needs while being responsive to the fiscal realities of present budget limitations.

What is clear to all is that the world is rapidly changing. The Warsaw Pact which once so clearly defined our military strategy is no longer a threat and large ground and air forces that were projected to fight a land war in Europe are no longer needed. Yet recent events in the Gulf War have shown that the need for a technology based, highly trained, professional armed force still exists. The challenge is to shape that force against an unknown foe while we cash in the "peace dividend" and reduce our defense budgets.

This paper will examine our reserve structure citing the Gulf War successes and failures of reserve mobilization to examine some basic problems that exist in our present system. These problems as identified in several major studies will be analyzed and a proposal for restructuring our reserve system will be offered. The focus of

this approach is the realistic expectation of limited training and achieving a total force that will be ready when called.

BACKGROUND

To understand our reserve problems a brief description of the structure is needed. The Ready Reserve consists of the Selected Reserve (including individuals in both National Guard and reserve units), the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), and the Inactive National Guard (ING). Other categories of reserve forces include the Standby Reserve, consisting of identified individuals with needed skills, yet they are not required to train and are not paid or affiliated with any unit. Finally, there is the Retired Reserve which consists of retirement eligible reservists that have not reached 60 years of age and regular enlisted personnel who have retired with more than 20 but less than 30 years of active duty.

Of interest to this discussion is the Ready Reserve, since like in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, these forces are the most likely to be mobilized in time of war. Forming the nucleus of the Ready Reserve is the Selected Reserve. These men and women are required to fulfill 48 four hour drill periods (usually fulfilled by a once a month drill weekend) and a two week active duty period once in each year. The remaining members of the Ready Reserve in the IRR and the ING receive no mandatory training and are maintained on rolls with their current ranks and specialties.

A PROUD TRADITION

The military forces of the United States have never resided exclusively in the Active Component. America has instead depended on reserve forces and mobilization to provide security needs in time of war. This century is full of examples where the United States has called on reservists, reinforced by conscripts and volunteers, to move rapidly from a peacetime economy to a war footing with a large scale mobilization. The World Wars, Korea, Berlin crisis of 1961, Cuban Missile crisis, Viet Nam and most recently Desert Storm and Desert Shield are examples of a fine tradition of service and resolve of the American reserve personnel.

As the draft ended and we moved to the all volunteer force the reserve component has also served a secondary purpose. Representing local communities all over the country, the reserve forces give the people a personal stake in any use of military force that may lead to mobilization. This important involvement of the American people prevents the isolation and dehumanizing effect of using a military force made up of full time professional soldiers.

HOW HAVE WE DONE?

Up to and including World War II the reserve forces were assimilated into our active forces without major problems. Their record was enviable and left the American people with the notion that a small standing force could be augmented quickly by a mobilization. The invasion of South Korea in June 1950 changed that view when unexpected manpower needs arose quickly that did not

fit with a strategy that called for full mobilization. To fulfill manpower needs, over two million men and women were called to active duty to augment the 1.4 million personnel left after the World War II. Many units were sent without proper training and the casualty rate was of unusually high proportions. Combat experience gained from the world war became the key element that eventually enabled our units to overcome our slow start. We learned the hard way that there is a price to be paid for poor readiness in either the active or reserve components.

Since the Korean War and before Desert Storm and Desert Shield this country has been very selective in its use of the reserve component. Very few ground combatant units have been called for combat duty and their use has been limited to support missions. In particular the use of transports from the Air National Guard has become invaluable to the support of any military operation. The one common ingredient to any call up from our reserve component, however, has been the enthusiasm and continued tradition of service when needed from the citizen soldiers.

Desert Storm

The reserve component was once again called up for service during the Gulf War. Support and combatant units from all services were utilized. Once again, a long lead mobilization was not possible and readiness became paramount in the utilization of our military forces. Our reserve supporting structure ranging from air transport to medical corps personnel were called early and performed flawlessly under difficult conditions. Our reserve

combatant forces did not fare as well though and were typified by the problems incurred by the army's three roundout brigades that were mobilized but not deployed because they were not combat ready.

The Department of Defense is actively pursuing the lessons learned from the Gulf War and to date three major investigations have been conducted concerning the problems incurred by the roundout brigades. The published results are:

1. Department of the Army Inspector General, Special Assessment of the National Guards Brigades' Mobilization, June 91.

2. General Accounting Office, NATIONAL GUARD: Peacetime Training Did Not Adequately Prepare Combat Brigades for Gulf War, September 91.

3. Congressional Research Service, The Army's Roundout Concept After the Persian Gulf War, 22 October 91.

All three studies were conducted independently and analyzed the failures of the roundout brigades premobilization training to adequately prepare them for possible combat operations. The breadth and scope of the three reports were somewhat different but the conclusions concerning the shortcomings were surprisingly similar. Their findings are summarized in the following list.

- Lack of individual, leader and crew skill proficiency

-- Lack of maintenance training at all levels, from drivers to supervisors, from battalion maintenance section to forward support battalion

-- Lack of realistic training, especially force-on-force, night and chemical training

-- Lack of leader and staff development training

-- Lack of leadership skills throughout the chain of command

-- Overstated unit status reports

-- Post-mobilization training plans that understated the number of post-mob training days by as much as three times the number actually required.

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Has war fundamentally changed over the years that our reserve forces can not spin up quickly and be deployed with confidence that they will be able to carry out their missions? The answer like the results of the Gulf War mobilization is mixed. Maneuver warfare using joint and combined forces orchestrated to make full use of technological advantages enjoyed by US forces is complicated. It is also dependent on well trained personnel and carefully schooled leaders to institute. War principles have not fundamentally changed but the knowledge needed to integrate forces, utilize

intelligence or operate our weapons tactically and efficiently has increased dramatically.

Attrition warfare with massed armies and mass casualties should have no place on future battlefields fought by our country. Keeping our technological edge and training our personnel to utilize that advantage is the true strength of our armed forces. We must make sure we utilize our reserve component in missions that may realistically be trained to in the time allotted and by truly integrating our active and reserve components into a complementary total force.

ANALYSIS OF THE FAILURES

To analyze the reasons behind the failures of the roundout brigades it is useful to look at the deficiencies found by the major studies cited and compare the units involved with some of the mobilization success stories from the Gulf War. The common thread among the listed findings was the lack of a knowledge or leadership base in the roundout brigades. The senior NCO and Officer corps was tactically weak and unable to individually perform and more sadly unable to teach or direct the younger troops. Unimaginative training and poor unit readiness could be easily predicted for units led by obviously unqualified personnel.

Not all reserve units met with the same problems that were common in the roundout brigades. The Air National Guard and the reserve forces of the Air Force were called early and immediately responded in concert with the active forces. Why are these units capable of rapid mobilization and mission performance? The answer

lies in the makeup of these units and the integrated training with and routine utilization by the active component. Up to 65 percent of these reserve units are full time personnel to include full time reservists, civilians and active duty military personnel. The pilots are, on the average, high time aviators with extensive military and civilian aviation backgrounds. This experience base enables these units to maintain high combat readiness that was once again proven during the Gulf War.

The Marine Corps had a lot of success blending smaller reserve units of company size into the active structure. Using active planning staffs while utilizing reserve units in concert with active units to execute the plan simplified the training requirements of the reserve units.

Finally many service support missions such as medical, transportation companies, port handlers and bulk fuel technicians were activated from the reserve component. With limited active support these services were provided by reserve units throughout the Gulf War. The difference between these units and the roundout brigades was that the individual skills necessary for mission performance are easily identifiable, have a civilian application and are usually performed in combat behind the lines. In fact, most may be executed without a knowledge of current war fighting doctrine.

The differences are readily apparent between the roundout brigades and the reserve units that successfully deployed to the Gulf War. Reserve forces are well suited for support missions that have a civilian application. Medical and transport functions are

easily maintained in the reserve structure where the civilian expertise of the reserve personnel is added free training for the reserve units they comprise. Likewise, small units that are not responsible for the total planning and conduct of combat operations can augment and compliment active forces with limited additional training when mobilized. The key criteria is the capability of a reserve unit to train to a limited mission with the time allotted to train or integrating with full time personnel to avoid placing reserve personnel into positions of leadership that they have not been trained to.

TIME FOR A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

As we continue to draw down our force levels it is more likely that our reserve forces will play a major role in any conflict that involves US military forces. It is time to assess what training levels can be achieved in limited available time and how to achieve the best possible mix of active and reserve components.

Examining the time allotted to train ready reserve personnel places realistic limits on the skills and readiness that can be expected of the reserve component when the skills required do not have any relation to the civilian occupation of its members. It is time to admit that the minimum of 39 training days available to a drilling reserve does not allow for professional growth or the mastering of skills beyond the most basic individual war fighting needs.

Accepting the assumption that it is the lack of training time that hinders reserve proficiency, we must relook at how we promote

our reserve officers and senior enlisted personnel. At present we promote our active and reserve personnel on the same time schedule. What that implies is that reserve personnel accrue the same knowledge and experience as their active duty counterparts in a little over a month that it takes a year to do on active duty. That statement is laughable but yet we seem surprised when leaders are judged to be lacking in the required skills upon mobilization. What should be adopted is a system that allows opportunity for promotion only after the requisite experience is obtained. This level could be gained by increased reserve training or civilian experience that is related to the military specialty of the individual reservists. For example, an airline pilot that flies transports in the reserves should be looked at for promotion ahead of the transport pilot that has a civilian occupation that does not have anything to do with aviation.

The resultant slower system of promotion in combatant units would call for changes in our present system. Senior enlisted and officer billets would have to be filled by full time personnel. These people could either be active duty or full time reserve personnel. A combination of both types is recommended to provide continuity while promoting trust and communication between our active and reserve components. Command opportunities should be assigned to full time reserve personnel. It is time to admit that key jobs in any unit, active or reserve, are full time jobs. In addition, age limits and physical condition minimums should be demanding and strictly adhered to since a slower promotion system will age the junior ranks that would be physically challenged in

combat. The resultant combination of competent full time leaders and mature soldiers would ensure our reserves would be ready when needed.

Finally, integrated training between our active and reserve units is needed to exercise our total force concept. Assuming more full time support personnel are assigned to reserve units, time to plan these evolutions would be available and would expose active and reserve units to realistic joint training. One weekend a month and a single 14 day active duty period is not a great deal of time, yet when carefully planned and aggressively pursued it is more than sufficient to train our reserves if the leadership to plan and execute the program is carefully selected, adequately trained , and assigned full time.

Conclusion

A "ready , capable, total force" is the centerpiece of our new national military strategy that was just recently published. It is a force that must be capable to respond to an unknown threat in an unknown period of time. What is clear, however, is that it will be a smaller force. It will rely on technology and maybe more importantly, professionally trained personnel. An important part of that force will lie in the reserve component. The failure of the roundout brigades to spin up for deployment to the Gulf War should be the signal that calls for a total reassessment our present reserve program.

It is time to integrate the reserve component into the Total Force to include training, active component support and a promotion

system that rewards experience and merit rather than time in the program. In Desert Storm we had the luxury of pronouncing the roundout brigades not prepared for combat and as a result did not have to send untrained soldiers to the battlefield. As our drawdown continues that scenario grows less likely and the importance of a well trained reserve component grows with each active duty soldier that is cut from our force. We must act now to ensure that our "ready, capable, total force" will be able to meet the security needs of this country. With that at stake we can just not afford to be wrong.